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LIVING FOR THE 'ISLAMIC CAUSE': SELECTED MEMOIRS OF CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM ACTIVISTS

Self-narratives have experienced a boom in the 20th century, not only in the Arab world but also worldwide. Memoirs and autobiographical accounts have often been used as an important source for social history, although it is essential to bear in mind that they are also a social construct of the author.

With the huge number of Arab self-narratives produced the research on this literary genre has made great strides over the past years. The majority of researchers have, however, virtually neglected the memoirs and autobiographical notes of religious activists. Such narratives are, of course, rarely literary highlights. Moreover, they still present the protagonist as having a simple and stable identity – in contrast to the complex and shifting multiple identities unfolded by post-modern literary writers.[1] Nevertheless, a careful reading and analysis of the texts can reveal several noteworthy features.

Taking Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's (1917–1996) memoirs[2] as an example, I had suggested in an earlier article[3] that the reminiscences of religious scholars and activists present a specific variation of the genre because of their characteristic mix of traditional "*tarjama* reflexes"[4] (e.g., little if any information on private life,

[1] On this shift in post-modern Arab autobiographies see Tetz Rooke, *From Self-made Man to Man-made Self: A Story about Changing Identities*, Remembering for Tomorrow, pp. 19–24, particularly pp. 23–24. Available online: [http://www.uclm.es/escueladetraductores/pdf/bookIngles.pdf] (14 May 2009).

[2] Ghazālī's memoirs were published posthumously in January 1997. His *Qiṣṣat Ḥayāt* (A Life Story) is not a comprehensive record of his lifetime. It starts with the first memory of childhood in 1920 and ends abruptly with the Camp David peace treaty in 1978. The Arab original was published in the journal "Islāmiyyat al-Maʿrifa", vol. II, no. 7, pp. 155–230.

[3] My detailed analysis is entitled *A Shaykh Remembers his Early Days: The Autobiographical Notes of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917–1996)*, and will be published in the Proceedings of the 23rd Congress of L'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants in Sassari/Sardinia.

[4] The term "tarjama" refers to the highly standardized traditional Islamic biography of an Islamic scholar. Cf. EI² (= *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, XII vols. Brill, Leiden 1960–2004), s. v. "Tardjama (1.)", X (1998), pp. 224–225 (D.F. Eickelman). – For "*tarjama* reflexes" in modern

focus on the educational and professional career, dream motifs / visions) with modern aspects of self-narration (e.g., mentioning the first memory, underlining the rebellious nature of the young hero; incorporating ideological-socio-political as also polemical-contents). To substantiate this hypothesis, this contribution deals with the life stories of five other, well-known 20th-century Egyptian protagonists of Islamic "daʿwa" (lit. invitation; mission) whose far-reaching influence cannot be denied. The authors chosen are as follows:

1. ʿUmar al-Tilimsānī's *Dhikrayāt lā mudhakkirāt* (Dār al-Iʿtiṣām, Cairo 1985);
2. Muḥammad al-Bahī's[5] *Ḥayātī fi riḥāb al-Azhar: ṭālib..wa-ustādh..wa-wazīr* (Maktabat Wahba, Cairo 1983);
3. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd's *al-Ḥamdu li-Llāh hādhihi ḥayātī* (Dār al-Maʿārif, Cairo 1985, 3rd ed.);
4. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Kishk's *Qiṣṣat ayyāmī: mudhakkirāt al-shaykh Kishk* (al--Mukhtār al-Islāmī, Cairo 1986), and
5. Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Shaʿrāwī's *Ḥayātī: min Daqādūs ilā l-wizāra (written "by the pen of"/ bi-qalam Muḥammad Ṣafwat al-Amīn)* (Qaitbay, Alexandria 1992) – in addition to Muḥammad Zāyid's account of his father--in-law entitled *al-Rāwī huwa l-Shaʿrāwī: Mudhakkirāt Imām al-Duʿāt* (Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo 1998, 2nd ed.).

The three last-mentioned writings raise the question as to whether the text is an authentic autobiography or in fact a biography narrated in the first person. Kishk, due to his blindness, did indeed need somebody to write his memoirs down. In Shaʿrāwī's case, however, it is possible that he gave the raw material of the memoirs to his distant relative, al-Amīn, in order to produce a readable story. Zāyid's version, also narrated in the first person,[6] is shorter than Amīn's but both narratives correspond to one another with regard to content, style and language. If one also takes other writings of Shaʿrāwī into consideration, the text seems to be fairly authentic. In both cases, in Shaʿrāwī's as well as in Kishk's, the reader cannot definitely decide to what extent the co-author and co-narrator respectively may have influenced the text but the same is true for the possible intervention of publisher or editor.

In the following, a cursory analysis of the selected memoirs may suffice to find out what kind of information we can gather from such sources, what their main

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self-narratives see D.F. Reynolds (ed., *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, California University Press, Berkeley 2001, p. 251) and T. Rooke (*"In My Childhood": A Study of Arabic Autobiography*, Almquist & Wiksell International, Stockholm 1997, pp. 92–97).

[5] Alternatively his family name is transliterated as "al-Bahayy" (cf. R. Brunner, *Annäherung und Distanz: Schia, Azhar und die islamische Ökumene im 20. Jahrhundert*, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, Berlin 1996) and "al-Bahai" (cf. W.-D. Lemke, *Maḥmūd Šaltūt (1893–1963) und die Reform der Azhar, Lang*, Frankfurt a. M. 1980). Instead, I am following the transliteration given by K. Zebiri (*Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993) and M. Zeghal (*Gardiens de l'Islam. Les oulémas d'Al Azhar dans l'Égypte contemporaine*, Presse de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris 1996).

[6] The book (*The Narrator is al-Shaʿrāwī: Memoirs of the missionaries' leader*) has been published on the occasion of the famous Shaykh's decease. In addition to Shaʿrāwī's memoirs, as told to his son--in-law (pp. 25–134), it includes obituaries written by representatives of the religious establishment.

focus and intention is, to what extent they shed light on the author's personality and on his times and also to characterize the particular type of discourse used in these self-narratives.

As was the case with al-Ghazālī, all the authors mentioned drafted their memoirs in the final decade of their lives, after a quite impressive career. Hence, we cannot expect any of them to have had a real interest in casting doubt on their own personality by exposing their inner selves; on the contrary we must assume that they wished to preserve and possibly to enhance their existing image, that of faithful and active Muslims and scholars committed to the Islamic cause who have tried their very best to make the right decision in difficult situations. In this sense, the texts are closer to memoirs than to autobiographies. In general, autobiographies differ from memoirs in focusing more on the author's personal development than on his public role. But the difference is not absolute and the boundaries between the two genres are rather blurred.[7] As suggested before, the above-mentioned texts may be better classified as a hybrid or "in-between"-form, a mix of classical with modern elements of (auto-) biographical writing. The varying foci and proportions seem to be determined by the socialisation and the career of the respective protagonist and the wider socio-political context; in addition, they are dependent on the implied reader of the publication. To illustrate this assumption, let us take a look at a brief biography of each author as well as at the main themes of their narratives.

ʿUmar al-Tilimsānī, born at Cairo in 1904, died there in 1986, was a lawyer and member of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) from 1933 on.[8] He headed this mother organization of Islamic fundamentalism from 1972 until his death, that is to say during the period of cooperation and (as some observers assume) of co-optation by the Egyptian state.[9] He was the first *murshid al-ʿāmm* ("supreme leader," head of the Egyptian MB) to come from a family of wealthy landowners. Thus, in contrast to the other authors who grew up in very modest or poor circumstances, Tilimsānī was able to enjoy a carefree life of luxury until he joined the MB. After describing his childhood in the extended family with details of the houses and landed estates,[10] not to forget the "religious, healthy environment,"

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[7] On the theoretical debate (discussion of P. Lejeunes' views, etc.), cf. M. Wagner-Egelhaaf (*Autobiographie*, Metzler, Stuttgart and Weimar 2000, esp. pp. 5ff.), and, with regard to Arabic Studies, S. Enderwitz (*Unsere Situation schuf unsere Erinnerungen: Palästinensische Autobiographien zwischen 1967 und 2000*, Reichert, Wiesbaden 2002, esp. pp. 23ff.).

[8] In his *Memories, not memoirs* Tilimsānī recounts how he was contacted by two Muslim Brothers in 1933, and how he joined the movement shortly after meeting for the first time (pp. 33–38) the MB's charismatic founder Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906–1949) whom he depicts as a humble person not interested in material gain, but in mission. It is noteworthy that Tilimsānī emphasizes several times (pp. 35, 38, 39) that he pledged allegiance (*bayʿa*) to God, not to al-Bannā and al-Huḍaybī (Bannā's follower as "al-murshid al-ʿāmm").

[9] For the more recent history of the MB see H. Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy: The Muslim Brothers and Mubarak, 1982–2000*, Tauris, New York and London 2004.

[10] The wealth of his family had its origins in the trade activities of his grandfather who had left Tlemcen (Algeria) for Egypt in 1830 after the French occupation of his homeland. Tilimsānī mentions that his grandfather, himself a "religious scholar wearing the turban," was a follower of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, the founder of the puritanical 'Wahhabite' movement in what later was to become Saudi

the author concludes that this was a "very happy period of my life" (pp. 11, 13). Although he attended the "kuttāb" (Koran school) in the village the family had moved to when he was 3 years old,[11] Tilimsānī is the only one of our protagonists who never studied at al-Azhar Institutions. He attended mostly private schools in Cairo and eventually, in 1931, graduated from the Law School, the most prestigious College in the past, as he remarks (p. 29) not without a certain pride and nostalgia.[12] Although he was arrested and imprisoned several times (1948, 1954–1971, 1981, 1984), Tilimsānī assures his readers that he never regretted his decision to become a member of the MB – "despite hard times" (p. 38). His *Memories, not memoirs* is mainly a history of the MB; about 20% of his book, however, offers quite an interesting insight into his personality. Compared to the other activists, he conveys the image of a fairly moderate and open-minded Islamist who rejects the use of violence and respects universal human rights.[13] The *murshid* is cautious, sophisticated and discreet in his choice of words; he rarely quotes the Koran or other religious sources and does not give any details of his years in detention. Certainly, as a lawyer, he must have been well aware of the fact that a less conciliatory manner in telling his life could put his own and the organization's survival at risk. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how he speaks about his youth. Like Maḥmūd, Shaʿrāwī and Ghazālī this Muslim Brother also shows his weak spots, not presenting himself at his best.[14] Tilimsānī even confesses that he was to some extent oriented to the West in his youth: He liked to go to ballrooms, cinemas and theatres, was interested in literature and the arts, and – for a while – in sports (riding horses during his childhood and boxing[15]). He learned to play an instrument (*ʿūd*), and names chess as his hobby (pp. 10, 12, 15, 17, 20, 30). Although he emphasizes that he never went as far with girls and alcohol as other Westernized young people did (i.e. committing 'fornication' and other

Arabia, and that he published several of his books at his own expense (p. 10). On the same page the narrator tells us that the discussions on different religious and social issues his grandfather had with his guests – friends from al-Azhar – attracted him to religion.

[11] After the death of the grandfather (before 'Umar entered secondary school?) the family returned to Cairo (p. 14).

[12] For a similar nostalgia including a direct social critique, cf. p. 21, when after praising al-Sanhūrī as a brilliant teacher who offered additional classes for free, Tilimsānī attacks the materialist attitude of today's educators. For an overview of the contribution of the famous legal scholar and professor ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanhūrī (1895–1971) to contemporary Arab civil law and jurisprudence, see E. Hill, *al-Sanhuri and Islamic Law*, Cairo Papers in Social Science, 10, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1987.

[13] Cf. Dhikrayāt, pp. 12–13: From the religious books he studied in his youth (mentioning Zamakhsharī, Ibn Hishām, Bukhārī, Muslim, etc.) he learned "not to attack anyone because of his thoughts;" p. 23: During his professional training he worked in the office of a retired judge, "although he was a Christian" because he was always far removed from that fanaticism (*taʿaṣṣub*) and non-respect towards Christians which came up in the era of Sadat; p. 35: He joined the MB "to fight Israel (sic!), not to assassinate ministers;" p. 285: "We are all human beings, we all make mistakes (...)."

[14] Cf. Dhikrayāt, p. 14 (he was "always third in class, never had the chance to be the best"), p. 20 (how but also why he failed in the Law School more than once), p. 29 (concerning his graduation he remarks that his best mark was in Islamic Law, in the other subjects he barely passed).

[15] He quit boxing because his instructor "once punched him hard" (ibidem, p. 15).

capital 'sins,' pp. 17, 20), he contradicts those ultraconservative Muslims who think that music, movies and so forth are strictly forbidden according to Islamic law (*ḥarām*) and inappropriate for a devout Muslim (p. 13). In addition, Tilimsānī admits that as a student he was a fervent admirer of Saʿd Zaghlūl (pp. 20, 22f.) and belonged to his nationalist and secular Wafd party (p. 24). This statement has to be seen in the context of the MB's shift to "Ḥizbiyya" (partisanship, party activities) in the 1980s and its alliance with the "New Wafd" just then reappearing in 1984. Both changes occurred on the initiative of Tilimsānī, the *murshid* at that time. As the organization had been banned since 1954, this pragmatic step was the only chance for the MB to make its voice heard in parliament.[16]

In contrast to the cautious Tilimsānī, Muḥammad al-Bahī's account of his life which was published posthumously shortly after his death,[17] is much more outspoken in his critique on socio-political issues. The title *My life in the (public) space of al-Azhar: Student – Professor – Minister* invites the reader to believe that his experience at University left the greatest mark on him. Information on the socio-economic situation of his family is completely missing in his memoirs; yet several allusions in the text (in particular to his salary, e.g. pp. 46, 79, 87, 127) point to a humble background. Born in 1905 in a village of the province al-Buḥayra (like many other famous scholars of al-Azhar), al-Bahī's career was typical of an Azharī in those days: Koran school, primary and secondary school education in Institutes affiliated to al-Azhar, then going on to study at the University (pp. 27–36). His excellent marks, eagerness to learn and great ambition[18] enabled him to make a rapid academic career. After his M.A.-degree, al-Bahī won a scholarship to Germany where he studied Philosophy and Psychology as well as languages (German, English, Latin, and Greek)[19] between 1932 and 1939 at the University of Hamburg. In 1936 he obtained his PhD "with distinction" (p. 44) but stayed in Germany till the outbreak of the Second World War be-

[16] For further information on the MB's party alliances and their success in parliamentary elections see Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit*, pp. 79–85.

[17] Cf. Preface of the publisher (Ḥayātī, pp. 3–24): After a short biography of al-Bahī, remarks on his unfinished book project on the difference between the Koranic Sūras of the Meccan and Medinan period and two anecdotes of his time as minister which show him as a strict but fair person keen to combat corruption and sloppiness in the administration, Wahba Ḥasan Wahba remembers how al--Bahī informed him as his main publisher early in 1982 that he wanted to write his memoirs. Wahba already felt that this would be his last book, "a kind of legacy to his audience, students, and friends" (p. 22). The memoirs are printed on pp. 27–145, followed by a list of Bahī's writings and a collection of photos of Bahī's public life.

[18] Because he was already 21 years old when coming to al-Azhar, he decided to go at once for the final examination, i.e. obtaining the *ʿālimiyya*-diploma without wasting the usual four years. After contacting students of the fourth year to get an idea of the *ʿālimiyya*, he started to learn non-stop for eight months (only interrupted by prayers). Finally, he was one of the four (out of 480) students who succeeded (pp. 32–35) and was accepted for the Master Program.

[19] In his memoirs al-Bahī describes vividly how difficult it was for him and his travelling companion – neither spoke any foreign language – to make themselves understood by signs and symbols and how they were dependent on the help of other persons to reach Berlin and find accommodation there (pp. 39–40).

cause his mentor, Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī,[20] ("I owe him a lot", Bahī admits on p. 45) had encouraged him to go on for his *Habilitation*, the prerequisite for a professorship. On his return to Egypt his *alma mater* appointed him Professor of Philosophy and Psychology at the Faculty of Theology (*kulliyyat uṣūl al-dīn*) – a remunerative position for a 'newcomer' that aroused the "jealousy" of other Azharīs who began "to spread rumours" about him; but the Dean of the Faculty, satisfied with his teaching method, 'defended him against the attacks' (p. 46). After this, al-Bahī held various administrative posts at al-Azhar. In September 1962 he reached the peak of his career as the head of the newly created Ministry of Islamic Endowments (*awqāf*) and Azhar affairs. In March 1964, however, he had to resign, and after teaching for about one year at Cairo University, he retired to concentrate on writing. His memoirs focus on his educational and above all on his professional career. The book can be read either as an apologia, an attempt at self-justification, or a kind of revenge on al-Azhar and the political regime. Al--Bahī blames nearly everybody[21] of opportunism, hypocrisy, corruption, nepotism, materialism and incompetence (to name just a few of his notorious critiques), but keeps quiet about his own opportunistic moves in the 1950s/1960s made in order to continue his administrative career. Although his problems with the state police were fairly harmless in comparison to Tilimsānī's or Kishk's, al-Bahī reports on them in great detail as he does with regard to the regime's strategies to isolate or silence oppositional voices. Having had quite a comfortable life (he was never in jail, was able to travel and publish, hold guest professorships in North Africa and the Gulf etc.), Bahī nevertheless concludes: "I did not enjoy my life in Egypt after coming back from Germany" (p. 142). This sounds as if he felt insulted and frustrated. An episode dealt with at considerable length (pp. 86–121) is the former minister's conflict with Shaykh al-Azhar Maḥmūd Shaltūt in 1963. The crux of the matter was the precise definition of their respective spheres of jurisdiction.[22] In his letters of protest to the Prime Minister and to Nasser, Shaltūt accused

[20] On Marāghī, a student of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Shaykh al-Azhar (University's Rector) for two terms (1928–1929 and 1935 until his death in 1945) see A.C. Eccel, *Egypt*, *Islam and Social Change: Al-Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation*, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, Berlin 1984, pp. 278f.

[21] Few persons escape his harsh critique, for instance al-Khiḍr al-Ḥusayn (1876–1958), a conservative scholar of Tunisian origin, living in Cairo as from 1920 (naturalization in 1932), Shaykh al-Azhar from 1952 until 1954 who is not only famous for his publications (among them refutations of secular scholars), but also as the founder or leading member of several neo-Salafite societies. (EI^2, s. n. "al-Khaḍir, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn," IV/1977, pp. 906f. – J. Majed; Brunner, *Annäherung*, pp. 190–191, n. 8). Al-Bahī (pp. 62f.) mentions him as one of the "few true scholars" who was a "humble and honest person towards family and friends;" on p. 48 he calls 'A. Maḥmud his "friend (...) a nice and intelligent person." On the (Neo-) Salafiyya see EI^2, s. v. "Salafiyya," VIII (1995), pp. 900–906 (P. Shinar) and pp. 906–909 (W. Ende). Originally connected with ideas of reform, the Salafiyya was converted into a political movement by fundamentalist organizations like the MB and other Islamic societies (Jamʿiyyāt).

[22] Details on this conflict are provided by Zebiri (Shaltūt, pp. 29f. and p. 38, n. 114, 116) and Brunner (*Annäherung*, pp. 268f.). Brunner is mostly interested in Bahī's temporary involvement in the ecumenical *taqrīb* – (lit. rapprochement) movement – an aspect of his life which is passed over in silence in his memoirs. Only once are his articles in the *taqrīb*-journal "al-Risāla" mentioned – though in the context of an interrogation in the police station (p. 50).

Bahī of 'issuing arbitrary resolutions which exceed his jurisdiction,' and further, of 'bringing the Azhar into disrepute by giving interviews to the Press in which he implies (...) corruption and inefficiency on the part of the Azhar Shaykhs.'[23] As would be expected, al-Bahī dismisses these accusations, reproaching Shaltūt for a transgression of his rights as Rector of al-Azhar and insisting on his own rights as minister. The documents reproduced in his memoirs are intended to back up his point of view. Nonetheless he goes on attacking his *alma mater*, because he has "seen how al-Azhar was getting weaker and weaker and how its Shaykhs have been manipulated by the government" (p. 143). Finally, the question remains as to whether al-Bahī wrote his memoirs only out of personal motives or also out of the Islamists' interest in proving the widespread "ignorance" (*jāhiliyya*) of society. At least two passages at the end, pointing to the concept of Sayyid Quṭb,[24] support the second interpretation.[25]

Whereas the audience that Tilimsānī and Bahī address is the well-informed and educated Muslim reader with an interest in political history, the other three authors are writing for the less educated Muslim who adheres to the popular but superficial interpretation of Islamic tenets which the Shaykhs have propagated in the last few decades.[26] All of them became influential in the Sadat period in which Islamic revivalism began its rise to prominence in Egypt. One may be astonished to find a Shaykh al-Azhar among them but the heyday of the Azhar seems to be long since over.

This refers to ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd who was born in a village (145 km northeast of Cairo, in the vicinity of Bilbays, p. 37) in 1910 into a Sharifian family[27] and served as Rector of al-Azhar from 1973 until his death in 1978. After

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[23] Maḥmūd Shaltūt qtd in Zebiri, Shaltūt, p. 29.

[24] Famous Muslim Brother (1906–1966) whose later writings, among them his best known book *Milestones* (*Maʿālim fi ṭ-ṭarīq*), were to become the foundation for radical Islamic movements. His concept of "jāhiliyya" (originally referring to the "pagan ignorance" of the pre-Islamic era, when there was 'no knowledge of God' according to the classical dogma) is based on the 'rebellion against God's sovereignty (*ḥākimiyya*),' i.e. the whole world is steeped in *jāhiliyya* because no society is following 'the Sharīʿa' as a complete system of life. For a thorough study of Quṭb's thought see, for instance, S. Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb*, Routledge, London 2006, or S. Damir-Geilsdorf, *Herrschaft und Gesellschaft: der islamistische Wegbereiter Sayyid Qutb und seine Rezeption*, Ergon, Würzburg 2003.

[25] On p. 133 al-Bahī comments on Quṭb's *Milestones* as follows: "I wished I had written this book." On p. 144 he says, according to the spirit of the "Quṭbists," "Egypt once again went back to *jāhiliyya* times. The whole society is not following the Koran. *Jāhiliyya* is still dominating our daily life."

[26] When reading the publications of Maḥmūd, Shaʿrāwī and Kishk, including their memoirs, one cannot help being surprised at their success. Their success seems to be a mirror image of the general decline of religious thought in contemporary Egypt, a result of the spread of a populist and unsophisticated form of Islam through the media during the last few decades. Despite the praise of their staunch admirers, neither their simple explanations of complex problems, nor their knowledge or logic or rhetoric can impress a reader familiar with the great thinkers of Islam. Cf., with regard to Shaʿrāwī, the article of H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi – A Portrait of a Contemporary 'Alim in Egypt*, [in:] *Islam, Nationalism, and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*, G.R. Warburg and U.M. Kupferschmidt (eds.), Praeger, New York 1983, 281–297.

[27] Both father and mother claimed Ḥusaynid descent, i.e. to belong to the family of the Prophet Muḥammad (pp. 30f.). Maḥmūd further mentions that his father was also an Azharī who studied

graduating from al-Azhar he studied at Paris from 1932 till 1940, the first eight years at his own expense, then as a member of the Azhar's student mission at the Sorbonne he received a scholarship and finally obtained a Doctoral Degree with the mark "excellent" in the History of Religions (pp. 125f.). His PhD thesis supervised by Louis Massignon was on Islamic Sufism[28] (on the Muslim mystic al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, d. 85), also a major topic of the Shaykh's later writings. In his memoirs the author depicts the stay in France as an emotional challenge for him: Some external aspects of 'European civilization' (cleanliness of streets, shops, people, or the university system) he appreciated and recommended his compatriots to imitate (pp. 118–119, 124), but the materialism and relativistic approach to religion and morals he outright rejected (p. 174 and *passim*). This may be also the reason why, apart from his studies,[29] Maḥmūd's contacts in Paris seem to have been restricted to the Great Mosque. There he met original and neo-Muslims (pp. 121f.) – people who did not 'lead him into temptation' (cf. pp. 119f.). Likewise, the only outdoor activities during his student days in Cairo he mentions in his memoirs were limited to the program offered by Islamic societies (pp. 103–110).[30] Maḥmūd's *Praise to God – This is my Life* is the most confusing for a 'Western' reader because it is suffused with traditional *tarjama* reflexes (see, in particular, his rather extensive comment on his teachers at al-Azhar, pp. 90––102). The main aim of his so-called life story is, as the title suggests, to praise and thank Gāod for his grace and higher guidance. As a consequence, the *Ḥamdala* is omnipresent in the text[31] as it is sprinkled with exhortations, admonitions, quotations from the Koran and the Sunna and excerpts of his own writings – a kind of 'recycling' very common in the writings of this kind of Shaykh. For these reasons it gives the reader more the impression of a sermon or a form of worship than of a life story.[32] Maḥmūd's imitation of classical *tarjama* features serves to underline his conservative and orthodox views of life and Islam. There is little biographical data[33] and few eye-witness accounts. Even Kishk has more to say about his life. Maḥmūd's reminiscences of childhood and youth (his professional career is not

under the famous Salafites Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā. His mother "dedicated her life to her husband and sons" (ibidem).

[28] One of the quite interesting passages of his book is his report on how he became acquainted with "Shaykh 'Abd al-Waḥīd Yaḥyā" alias René Guénon in 1940 (al-Ḥamdu, pp. 161–166). One of his friends in Paris (an emigrant from White Russia) had asked him to give a book to the Shaykh on his return to Egypt. After some vain attempts he was able to meet the Shaykh ("I will never forget this day (...)," p. 164) – a French convert to Islam (1886–1951) who after a long journey of spiritual search was initiated into a Sufi brotherhood in Egypt. From 1930 he lived in Cairo.

[29] He admits on p. 123 that the studies were not easy because of the difficult language and the different style of writing at the university.

[30] Among them the "Jam 'iyyat al-Hidāya" of al-Khiḍr Ḥusayn, cf. note 21 above.

[31] To give just one example, cf. p. 88: "All failed (the exam) with the exception of one person (...) it was me (...) al-Ḥamdu li-Llāh."

[32] See also the result of Rooke's analysis (*Childhood*, pp. 93–96).

[33] Missing dates are also a problem in the other selected memoirs. Moreover, none of them is narrated in a linear, strictly chronological fashion. Flashbacks and (in the case of the last mentioned three authors) the insertion of pious exhortations and quotations are a common feature.

dealt with) are largely just a pretext for preaching the need to return to traditional Sharīʿa norms[34] and to keep alive the 'good old days.'[35]

ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Kishk (1933–1996), a well-known, blind Egyptian preacher, Islamic activist and bestselling author, was born in a village near Alexandria (al--Buḥayra province) and grew up in extreme poverty. The third of six children, he went blind in one eye at the age of 6 – due to wrong treatment by the village barber. In puberty Kishk lost his sight completely. Although his father, a shopkeeper, spent all his money to spare him "the prison of blindness" and his eldest sister sold her jewellery even an "expensive" operation in Cairo was unsuccessful (pp. 7, 9–12). As a result, poverty and blindness determined the preacher's youth and constitute a prominent place in the first part of his *Story of my days – memoirs of Shaykh Kishk* (pp. 7–57): From childhood on he was forced to take small jobs (in the local mosque, etc.) in order to finance his studies and to support his family; moreover, he always needed somebody to help him and read for him during his studies at school and university. With bitterness Kishk remembers the persons who shied away from taking responsibility: his uncle who only had good advice but no money to offer after his father's death in December 1952 (pp. 13–14), or people who soon gave up assisting a blind student and, as once really happened, left him out in the cold (pp. 17–18, 36–38). At the same time he recalls those supportive persons (apart from his older brother, a few good friends) who made it possible for him to finish his education. Coming from a poor background Kishk is keen to present a detailed list of his "successes" inside and outside the school: winning a Koran competition, his early occupation as an Imām (leading prayers) and preacher (pp. 9f.) as well as his very good marks. After finishing secondary school at the Azhar Institute as "number one" in all exams, the victory day as he notes (pp. 23, 34), he began to study at the Uṣūl al-Fiqh-Faculty. Although he had the dream of lecturing at al-Azhar, he followed his mission to preach and teach poor people after obtaining the *ālimiyya*-diploma in 1962 – the first time, he admits, that he did not get "full marks" (pp. 55–58, 65). His fame as a preacher reached its peak in the 1970s mainly a result of his recorded sermons which were not only sold in Egypt.[36] Due to the radical Shaykh's vocal critique of the Egyptian government, he was arrested three times, first in 1965, then from 1966 till 1968, and again in 1981. His experiences of the dehumanizing and terrifying treatment in custody make up two thirds of his life story (pp. 85–211, 249–264) and are the main focus of his memoirs. Like the *Days of my life* of the Muslim Sister Zaynab

[34] Taking his parents as role models, he shifts to the topic of family planning quoting one of his own *fatwas* (legal advices) (pp. 32–36). For another example on the benefit of early marriage see below.

[35] In contrast to Ghazālī and Shaʿrāwī who also want to preserve the tradition of Koran schools but criticize the former brutal methods (child beating, frightening atmosphere), Maḥmūd always speaks of the *kuttāb* in laudatory tones (pp. 38–39: "good atmosphere").

[36] This aspect of his career is not mentioned in his memoirs. On the significance of such cassette tapes, among them Kishk's, for spreading Islamist ideas, see the article of E. Sivan, *Eavesdropping on Radical Islam*, "Middle East Quarterly" II, 1 (March 1995), pp. 13–24. – In contrast to Kishk, Shaʿrāwī is underlining the importance of "listening to the Shaykh's voice" (Shaʿrāwī as qtd in Zāyid, p. 32).

al-Ghazālī[37], Kishk's prison memoirs are intended to elucidate how much his survival of torture and humiliation is owing to his strong faith and unshaken belief system. The purpose of the account is to unmask the regime, its brutality, injustice and illegitimacy. Like Maḥmūd and Shaʿrāwī the author often recurs to Koran, Ḥadīth (Traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad) and the example of the *salaf aṣ-ṣālīḥ* (early Muslim Community) and uses parts of his own sermons and *fatwas* to fill the text.

Another, even more successful preacher was Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Shaʿrāwī. Born in 1911 in a village called Daqādūs in the Nile Delta (near to Damiette), known for its fierce resistance to the British Protectorate, he graduated from the Faculty of Arabic Language in 1941. During his time at university Shaʿrāwī was once arrested for a short time (30 days) for participating in a demonstration of Azhar students (quoted in Amīn's ed., pp.107f.). At first he dreamt of doctor's honours, but he gave up this project, as a famous Shaykh told him he was already a "good preacher (...) and did not need titles to spread *daʿwa*" (ibidem, p. 111). Hence, after receiving a special teaching certificate from al-Azhar in 1948, he worked in various places as a teacher of Arabic and as a missionary (*dāʿī*): first in Egypt (1948–1950 in Ṭanṭa, Zaqāzīq and Alexandria), then between 1950 and 1960 at the King Abdel Aziz-University in Mecca, a period of great influence on his future career and ideas. After that in 1963 (1966?) the Shaykh was active in Algeria, and in the 1970s again in Saudi Arabia. In between, Shaʿrāwī held several posts at the Ministry of Islamic Endowments (*awqāf*). Finally, in November 1976, he was appointed Minister of Awqāf but only one year later he had to resign because of his criticism of Sadat's visit to Israel (ibid., pp. 116–120). As with Ghazālī and Kishk, his rise to fame began under Sadat as a media-mufti, a bestseller-author and the head of several charity activities. As the private scholar and adviser of several actresses Shaʿrāwī was responsible for their "repentance" and subsequent withdrawal from the screen and stage.[38] A number of his admirers regarded him almost as a saint. Thus it came as no surprise when his death in 1998 was *Mourned by millions*, according to headlines on the "al-Ahrām Weekly On-line".[39] Not only Shaʿrāwī's biography but also the narrative of his life strongly resembles that of Ghazālī, although the latter's memoirs focus more on his political activities than on his childhood and youth which is the prime interest of Shaʿrāwī. The first memory and the (classical)[40] dream motif, for instance, we find

[37] On Z. al-Ghazālī's (1917–2005, not a relative of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī!) prison memoirs (Ayyām min Ḥayātī, Dār al-Shurūq, Beirut and Cairo 1986) see M. Cooke, *Zaynab al-Ghazālī: Saint or Subversive?*, "Die Welt des Islams" XXXIV (1994), pp. 1–20.

[38] On those "fannānāt at-tā'ibāt" (penitent actresses) see B. Reuter, *Gelebte Religion: Religiöse Praxis junger Islamistinnen in Kairo*, Ergon, Würzburg 1999, pp. 70–76.

[39] Kh. Dawoud, *Mourned by millions*, "Al-Ahrām Weekly On-line" No. 383 (25 June–01 July 98), [http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1998/383/eg4.htm] (06 April 2009).

[40] A quasi modernized version of the classical dream motif (in the sense of vision or heavenly inspiration) can be found in Tilimsānī's memoirs (Dhikrayāt, p. 11): His "greatest dream" – in his childhood but "even today" – is of "flying without wings" (the 'old dream of humanity'), and, he continues to say, he always enjoyed travelling by airplane. Nowadays, at the end of his days, he wishes to return to the village, to the simple, tranquil life, to the beauties of nature. Is this passage another

only in his and Ghazālī's life story. In both cases these literary devices are used to anticipate the future religious and/or political orientation of the protagonist. Whereas Ghazālī's 'first memory' is placed in the context of Egyptian nationalism under the British protectorate (watching the parade of British troops in his mother's arms in 1920),[41] Shaʿrāwī's underlines the religious context: He 'remembers' the pious words of his father.[42] His father's dream (vision), just like Ghazālī's father's vision, predetermines the birth of a son who will become a religious scholar.[43] Both preachers depict the transition from childhood to 'shaykhhood' as a difficult time. They still enjoyed playing and as little 'rebels' they were always up to pranks.[44] Shaʿrāwī relates that he sometimes ran away from the Koran school to go to the village river and play with the figures he had formed out of mud and clay.[45] His father, however, gave him a beating and took him back to the school where the teacher punished the pupils for even the smallest mistake in recitation. But, in the end, when he had finished memorizing the Koran, the boy was delighted with the present he received and the feast his father organized on that occasion.[46] As contemporary witnesses Ghazālī and Shaʿrāwī offer some impressions of Egypt's socio-political situation (e.g., the effect of the world economic crisis in the 1930s[47]). Like Tilimsānī, Shaʿrāwī presents himself as not being averse to the pleasures of life: He had a weakness for delicious food, liked to dance and to write poems, loved jokes and fun, and he was a heavy smoker for half a century.[48] Quoting of poems, those of his favourite Aḥmad Shawqī (Egyptian poet and dramatist, 1868–1932) as well as his own ones, is a specific feature of Shaʿrāwī's memoirs. Another is his frequent use of the Egyptian vernacular. Coming from a modest background, the Shaykh wishes to demonstrate how an average but hard-working and committed Muslim is able to become a very important person – as the title of his memoirs in Amīn's version already suggests: *My life: From Daqādūs* (i.e. the name of the village he came from) *to the Ministry*.

There is no doubt that all five protagonists belong to the Neo-Salafite or fundamentalist brand of Islam. Some of them do not mention it but all of them had contacts to the MB, either as full members or as sympathizers. With regard to politics their attitudes range from moderate through opportunist to militant; Kishk

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attempt to prove his humane and liberal outlook? – Kishk (Qiṣṣat, p. 53) presents another version of the dream motif when he speaks of a "vision" just one day before his final exams at the university.

41 Ghazālī, Qiṣṣat, p. 155.

42 How old he was at that time, is not mentioned. Cf. Amīn's ed., p. 12: his father saying the Basmala – "In the name of God (...)" – and "Everything comes from God".

43 See Ghazālī, Qiṣṣat, p. 157; Amīn's ed., p. 8; Zāyid, Rāwī, p. 52.

44 Examples are given in Shaʿrāwī, Ed. Amīn, pp. 21–22, and Zāyid, pp. 74ff.

45 Ed. Amīn, p. 15; Zāyid, Rāwī, pp. 47–49.

46 Ed. Amīn, p. 21. Shaʿrāwī assures the reader that he has kept the red shoes he had chosen himself and that he received as a present "till today".

47 In this context Shaʿrāwī tells the story of how he persuaded his father to buy him several books he pretended to be in need of for his studies at the Azhar Institute in Zāqazīq though they were above his level. His father realized this but bought the books, obliging him afterwards to recount what he had read to the village Shaykh every week. Back in the village, several people scolded the boy for inducing his father to buy books for the price of a cow (Ed. Amīn, pp. 59–64; Zāyid, Rāwī, pp. 46f.).

48 Ed. Amīn, pp. 19, 26–27, 115, 131; Zāyid, Rāwī, p. 42.

is the only one who is explicit in saying that he had praised the assassination of Sadat.[49] With the exception of Tilimsānī, the intolerance of the authors is especially conspicuous in sweeping, essentialist statements on religious minorities and allegations of conspiracy plans on the part of the Jews, Orientialists or the West.[50]

Differences in outlook are not only reflected in the focus, proportion (of traditional and modern components) and style of the memoirs, but also find their expression in the manner in which certain thematic elements that are common features in such religio-political narratives are emphasized or de-emphasized. I have already hinted at some of them. Yet, being convinced that the gender issue is one of the best indicators of the authors' real stance, I will select two aspects to demonstrate their conservative, male-biased views.

1. Concerning the family background, such self-narratives usually underline the religious milieu in which the author grew up. Particularly the father, in the case of Tilimsānī also the grandfather, is presented as an inspiring role model. Pinning all his hopes on the son, the father made every effort to foster the boy's education, even using force. But in retrospect this patriarchal authority is viewed as positive and excused: the father was strict but loved his son, although he never told him so.[51] The mother's role is either ignored or she is portrayed as passive, as a transmitter of the father's decisions or as a mere spectator. The existence of sisters may be mentioned but they are not portrayed as significant either. Brothers or other close male relatives are only of interest insofar as they contributed to the author's career or can serve as a counter-model.

2. As in the classical biographies the private life of the protagonists remains almost invisible. The authors hide the names of their spouses as a secret; they may note the number of their children including their sex but usually without giving their names. Bahī, for instance, talks at length about his famous father-in-law, but not of his wife (p. 49); in 1944 when the couple's first (?) child was born, it seems that only he as the father "was blessed by God with a daughter called Nadja" (p. 50). Kishk mentions in passing that his wedding took place in winter 1965, a few months before he was put in jail for about two years (p. 83). When he was released in 1968 and came home, he says, everyone was surprised – his mother, brothers and other relatives – and, full of pride, he remembers the mass of congratulations he received (pp. 211–214). He forgets to mention his newly-married wife who had waited patiently for her husband, maybe because

[49] Kishk, Qiṣṣat, p. 261. After his release from prison in 1982, Kishk was prohibited from preaching in public.

[50] Cf., for instance, the remarks of Sha'rawī with regard to his critique of Sadat's visit to Israel (Ed. Amīn, pp. 118f.): "Never trust Jews (...) they never keep to contracts (...);" for similar anti-Jewish statements (here next to positive remarks on Hitler) see Bahī (Ḥayātī, pp. 42, 44); or Maḥmūd (Ḥamdu, pp. 175f.): on "the Jew Durkheim", the "Jew's program" to control the world). Tilimsānī also mentions Quṭb's *Milestones* as one of the most important books, second to Bannā's, and admits that temporarily he was pro-German because anti-British. Though he never attacks "the Jews" (he always speaks of Israel or Zionism), he nevertheless blames "the West" for having helped to establish Israel with the aim of "demolishing Islam". For "the Orientalists' conspiracies" cf. Bahī (Ḥayātī, pp. 127–130, on his experience at the McGill-University in Toronto).

[51] Tilimsānī, Dhikrayāt, p. 16.

she had not yet borne him a child? It is only on page 249, while talking of his arrest in 1981 that the reader learns that he had 7 children with his wife. And why is this mentioned? Because his children were so terrified when the police came banging on the door to take him away. The mother's fear is once again ignored. Incidentally, his favourite child seems to have been the youngest, a boy of course, who is the only one mentioned by name. Was this because of his "brilliant questions" while accompanying his father to the mosque (p. 248)? Or does this mean that all his other children were girls? Both Maḥmūd and Shaʿrāwī had an overhastily arranged marriage while still at secondary school, the former[52] at the age of 13 and the latter[53] at the age of 15/16 (?). Evaluating their marriage at the end of their life, both consider it a happy one and a proof that early marriage as practised in those days was better than the late marriage in vogue today which is depicted as a threat to decency and virtue in the young. Both authors recommend to the young generation that marriage should take place with the approval of the parents.[54] Additionally, Shaʿrāwī notes that he always delighted in playing with his children and grandchildren.[55] The purpose of these remarks, however, is to demonstrate that he followed the model of the Prophet Muḥammad, who, according to a famous tradition (Ḥadīth), used to play with his grandchildren Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Here again Tilimsānī presents a rather atypical story. His marriage was also arranged by his father who seems to have been afraid his son might commit "fornication" (*zinā*) if married off at a later time. Being a young rebel, he first wanted to resist his parents' plans because he wished to choose a bride himself; but he soon agreed. In retrospect he affirms: "How good it was that I married this wife. I loved her and never looked at any other woman (p. 19)". He goes on to say that he still has to cry when thinking of her although she died in 1979, after 7 years of illness. Tilimsānī further describes her as the ideal spouse – in traditional terms: She was patient and obedient, never asking him what he was doing or going to do. She waited for him while he was imprisoned for 17 years, never made trouble either for him or his family, although he was extremely jealous.[56] This declaration of love is quite remarkable for its frankness; at least it is the most detailed one compared to the other texts analysed here. Yet Tilimsānī, too, uses this context to admonish young people not to marry out of love, saying that respect and friendship are more important. The permission of the parents, he emphasizes, is absolutely necessary because they have more experience and know

[52] Maḥmūd, al-Ḥamdu, pp. 76ff.

[53] Shaʿrāwī, Ed. Amīn, p. 69ff.

[54] This hints at the so-called secret marriages (*'urfī*-marriage, etc.). On this phenomenon and its particular relevance in Egypt see the contributions of M. Hanafi El Siofi and R. Badry in R. Badry and M. Rohrer and K. Steiner (eds.), *Liebe, Sexualität, Ehe und Partnerschaft – Paradigmen im Wandel: Beiträge zur orientalistischen Gender-Forschung*, fwpf, Freiburg 2009, pp. 231–245 and 205–229.

[55] Shaʿrāwī, Ed. Amīn, pp. 71, 120. At least he mentions the sex of his five children and their names.

[56] Tilimsānī gives one example for his extreme jealousy in his memoirs (Dhikrayāt, p. 20): He had bought a radio. But when he noticed that his wife was fascinated when listening to a particular male singer's voice he asked her to turn the radio off. She obeyed and remained patient, knowing that he was jealous.

better. But, one may object, does this respect for the parents also imply permitting compulsory marriage? The author does not go into this question. In any case, a bit later, Tilimsānī makes it clear that he "does not like modern women and modern talk on gender equality" (p. 21f.). According to his view gender equality would result in the loss of women's femininity and dignity. This does not mean, he assures the reader, that he does not respect women or is against their education and working in "appropriate" fields, but his faithful spouse remains the ideal and his recommended role model. These statements are in harmony with the mainstream gender discourse of so-called moderate traditionalists and fundamentalists which is complementary and 'biologistic' in its approach.

To conclude: With regard to the form, content, focus and style, the selected narrators make use of traditional (*tarjama*) as well as modern elements of an (auto-) biography. The proportion varies according to the individual social (family) background, the educational, professional as well as political career and intended (Muslim) audience. The major difference to classical biographies is the presence of political and polemical 'ingredients,' the main similarity concerns the little information given on the author's private life. The principal purpose of the memoirs is both political and religious: It implies a critique of society and of the regime and aims to revive lost traditional norms and disseminate Islamist views. Thus the self-narratives can be seen as a religio-political testament to the authors' admirers and supporters or even as 'committed literature' of a fundamentalist brand. Above all, most definitely they are part of the activists' 'lifelong' struggle for the 'Islamic cause.'

Streszczenie

Żyć dla „islamskiej sprawy". Wybrane wspomnienia współczesnych działaczy

Artykuł jest poświęcony wspomnieniom pięciu egipskich autorów, znanych odbiorcom w krajach muzułmańskich z działalności religijnej i politycznej. Poddano analizie formę, styl, najważniejszą problematykę i przesłanie wspomnień. Ukazało to, z jednej strony, w jakim stopniu narratorzy łączą tradycję z nowoczesną (auto)biografią, a z drugiej strony, w jakiej mierze problematyka ta i jej wymiar zależą od ich relacji społecznych, drogi zawodowej i implikowanego odbiorcy ich publikacji. Chociaż autobiograficzne teksty mogą być traktowane jako literatura, dla ich zagorzałych zwolenników stanowią religijny i polityczny testament ich bohatera.